

(Washington, DC)- Late this afternoon in the midst of a rare weekend session, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill which included a modified version of Congresswoman Gwen Moore's (D-WI) SHIELD Act which would help protect victims of domestic abuse residing in federally-funded domestic violence shelters. The Safe Housing Identity Exemption for the Lives of Domestic Violence Victims (SHIELD) Act, a bill introduced by Congresswoman Moore earlier this year, would ensure that victims of domestic violence who have fled their abuser could not then be tracked and found through the Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) new Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). Moore's proposal, which negotiators included in a bill reauthorizing the Violence Against Women Act, is now scheduled to be sent to the President's desk to be signed into law.

"I am overjoyed that House and Senate negotiators recognized the critical importance of this proposal for a very vulnerable population. The lives and safety of hundreds of thousands of women and children are at risk," Congresswoman Moore said. "This new law will ensure that HUD rules don't allow the identities and location of victims in domestic violence shelters to be exposed to those who want to assault or kill them."

Currently, all domestic violence shelters, transitional housing programs, homeless shelters, and emergency shelters receiving funds from the HUD McKinney-Vento Act are required to submit the names and other personal information of all who use the facility into the HMIS tracking database. Employees and contractors of federal, state, and local agencies-some of whom may be abusers-have access to the HMIS database. A study from Carnegie Mellon University has found that 53 percent of the U.S. population is likely to be uniquely identified by only place, gender, and date of birth.

The SHIELD Act would exempt shelters from having to submit personal information-such as first and last name, Social Security number, date of birth, ethnicity and race-about each person who seeks safety and shelter at their facility. Instead of offering such specific information, the SHIELD Act recommends using non-personal identifying information for data collection. This would still allow HUD to perform unduplicated counts and statistical analysis of those benefiting from its services in order to measure the effectiveness of McKinney-Vento Act programs.

Thirty-seven states have confidentiality laws that conflict with the requirement that shelters contribute information about those who use their services to the HMIS database, including Wisconsin. HUD initially considered exempting domestic violence victims in 2003, then reversed its position and removed the domestic violence exemption from the final HMIS

standards released in 2004.

The proposal included in the Violence Against Women Act reauthorization passed today will exempt visitors to domestic violence shelters from having their personally identifying information from being openly listed on the database. Moore's SHIELD Act would have exempted that population as well as all domestic violence victims who might end up at a regular homeless shelter that serves all homeless clients. Her bill had been approved by the House Financial Services Committee last month.

###